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NORTH CHICAGO -- Area schools could receive a dramatic increase in federal impact aid for students from military families if bipartisan bills introduced by U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, become law.

Three schools districts in the 10th Congressional District -- North Chicago, North Shore and Glenview -- educate children from Great Lakes Navy Base and Fort Sheridan, but because military housing is owned by the federal government and is not subject to property taxes, the U.S. Department of Education helps defray costs through the Impact Aid program.

Under House Resolution 12, Protecting Impact Aid for North Suburban Schools Act, the three districts would pool their military students in order to be reimbursed at the highest "heavy impact" level of \$6,000 per student and all three would receive more in federal dollars.

Proposed in the Senate by Illinois U.S. Sens. Barack Obama and Dick Durbin the act is needed, Kirk said, because the Navy base "may decline by 2011" due to on-going upgrading and privatization of military housing and also because fewer sailors are needed in the modern Navy.

North Chicago schools were in danger of having their aid reduced to the minimum in 2005, when enrollments by military children dropped below the 30 percent military child threshold used to qualify a school for the highest impact payments.

The drop was precipitated both by the privatization effort and because more Navy families have opted to live outside the district. Kirk saved the higher rate for the district, he said, after finding a provision in federal law that stipulated any facility undergoing conversion to public/private housing could not lose its impact-aid status.

New privately operated housing units at Great Lakes will number 1,100 by 2011. Military housing in Highwood/Highland Park will decrease from 800 to 280 and has also been

decreased in Glenview. Kirk said he wanted to see an additional 100 housing units once planned for construction in Kenosha, added to Great Lakes.

The impact aid is particularly crucial to North Chicago schools which receive about \$8 million a year in federal assistance. Higher reimbursement would also relieve the \$3 million per year military kids have cost taxpayers in the North Shore School District.

North Chicago schools spend \$9,182 per pupil compared to the North Shore District in Highwood/Highland Park, which spends almost \$12,000. Enrollment in North Chicago schools is 72 percent low income.

The second bill, the Government Reservation Accelerated Development for Education Aid Act, would guarantee full federal funding -- an estimated \$1 billion per year -- for all schools that educate children who are military dependents.

"More than 1,400 school districts and 1.5 million children across the country depend on the Impact Aid program because schools are close to military bases," Kirk said. "I am pleased that two dozen Republicans and Democrats joined me in this proposed reform to boost education funding."

Kirk and the bills' other sponsors have until 2011 to enact the legislation.

"Our hope is to go all the way this time," Kirk said. "The quickest way to take a sailor's mind off their mission is to have them worrying about their children's education back home."